

Richard Hunter, 377, *Mermaid*

Researched by Marcia Watson

Richard Hunter, 16, labourer, can read and write imperfectly, was committed on 26 February 1849 by GP Elliott Esq, charged on the oaths of Mary Ann Barnes and others, with feloniously stealing from her person, at Lambeth, one purse, and 12/-, her property and monies.

At the adjourned session, at St Mary, Newington, Surrey, on Saturday, 17 March, Richard was indicted for a felony and was ordered to remain in custody until the next Assize.¹

The Spring Assizes, Home Circuit, was held at Kingston, Surrey, on 26 March 1849:

Richard Hunter, 16, a well-known young thief, was indicted for stealing from the person of Mary Anne Barnes a purse containing 12s, her property. Mr Clarkson prosecuted, and Mr Charnock defended the prisoner. The evidence of the robbery by the prisoner was most conclusive. He was watched by Romaine, a very useful officer, in the New Cut, Lambeth, on 19 February, in company with two other boys, evidently prowling about for the purposes of plunder. He was at length seen to lift up the gown of the prosecutrix and put his hand into her pocket, and he withdrew it clenched and then made a motion as if passing something to one of his companions, who immediately ran off. The constable then seized the prisoner and, after a violent struggle, succeeded in securing him. On putting her hand into her pocket, the prosecutrix found that her purse and its contents had been stolen.

Mr Charnock, in his address to the Jury, commented upon the fact that no money had been found on the prisoner and that the policeman was unable to swear that the prisoner actually passed the purse to his companion.

After deliberating a short time, the Jury did not appear likely to agree, and his Lordship inquired if there was any portion of the evidence that they wished to have read over to them.

The Foreman of the Jury said that they felt a difficulty on account of there being no proof that the prisoner actually passed away the purse and that the property was not produced.

His Lordship told them that if Juries were to decline to convict in all cases where stolen property was not produced, it might tend to occasion a great failure of justice. In the present case, they were to say, as reasonable men, whether the fair inference from the evidence was not that the prisoner passed the purse to the other lad, who ran away with it.

The Jury then again deliberated for a short time, when they returned a verdict of Guilty.

A previous conviction of robbery from the person was then proved against the prisoner, and he was sentenced to be transported for 7 years.²

Richard was transferred from Horsemonger-lane Gaol to Parkhurst Prison on 31 July 1849. He was a labourer and had seven previous convictions. Richard boarded the *Mermaid* on 28 December 1850 for the voyage to Western Australia.

His description on arrival at Fremantle on 7 May 1851 was:

377. Richard Hunter, 18, 5'5", dark brown hair, hazel eyes, round face, fresh complexion, no marks, single and a stonemason. Perhaps stone masonry was a skill he learnt at Parkhurst as he was described as a labourer previously.³ Richard received a ticket of leave later in the year, on 27 October 1851.

On 23 February 1853, Perth Police Court: Richard Hunter, t.l. out after hours, and sleeping in the hush. Fined 5s and costs. The fine had little effect as five days later - Richard Hunter, t.l., and Edward Jones, t.l., out after hours; the former fined 5s and costs, the latter dismissed with a caution.⁴

No further trace of Richard Hunter has been found.

¹ Calendar of Prisoners. Surrey Quarter Sessions at Newington Gaol. March 1848 to December 1853. Australian Joint Copying Project Reel M1834

² Morning Advertiser, 27 March 1849, p4

³ SROWA Acc 128/1-32

⁴ Inquirer (Perth, WA : 1840 - 1855), 2 March 1853, p3; The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News (WA : 1848 - 1864), 4 March 1853, p3